

# Gravina Access Project

Volume 2 December 1999

## **Gravina Access Project Completes Scoping**

Community interest and participation are high in Ketchikan, Alaska. That's the message the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) and members of the Gravina Access Project team take away as the first phase of the project, called "scoping," comes to a close. Scoping is a process through which project team members listen to ideas and concerns of people and agencies affected by the project and identify a range of issues needing further study. Scoping ensures that future studies associated with the project reflect public and agency input. Look inside for a summary of the comments project team members received.

## **Purpose and Need Statement is Underway**

Project team members are working with the City of Ketchikan, the Ketchikan Gateway Borough, and other officials to refine a statement identifying the purpose of and need for the project. The potential problems that better access to Gravina Island could help address include the following:

- Lack of access to Gravina Island makes it difficult for the Ketchikan Gateway Borough, the Alaska Mental Health Trust Land Office, and other property owners on Gravina to provide land to meet the needs of Ketchikan citizens and encourage land development on both sides of Tongass Narrows.
- The scarcity and high cost of developable land on Revillagigedo Island severely limit opportunities for growth and development of diversified industrial, commercial, residential, and recreational pursuits. This inhibits the local economy.
- Current access to the airport is inconvenient and expensive for airport users and businesses.
- Tongass Narrows is an important waterway for north-south marine transportation. Vessels crossing the main flow of marine traffic introduce additional hazard and exacerbate operating conditions.
- Current access inhibits the movement of emergency vehicles and medical personnel and equipment.

A draft purpose and need statement will be presented in January 2000.



## **Good Ideas and Heartfelt Concerns Identified During Scoping**



We received your comments by fax, regular mail, and e-mail, and we heard your ideas and concerns at the public scoping meeting, the agency scoping meeting, the project development team (PDT) meeting (see accompanying story for details), and other meetings in the community. Some comments included descriptions of how and where to situate a

tunnel in Tongass Narrows and locations for a bridge. Other comments simply indicated that the existing airport ferry is adequate. The following sections provide an overview of your ideas and concerns. For a complete summary, we encourage you to read a report titled “Gravina Access Project Scoping Summary,” which is available for review at the Ketchikan project office, City of Ketchikan office, and the Borough Department of Planning and Community Development office.

### **Reasons for supporting improved access to Gravina:**

Some residents suggested that a better connection to Gravina Island could increase the amount of land available to residents and bring new economic opportunities to the community. Other residents indicated that the current access, with its required fare, places an economic burden on businesses.

### **Reasons for opposing improved access to Gravina:**

Some residents opposed improving the connection to Gravina Island via Pennock Island because of potential impacts to the lifestyle of Pennock Island residents and sites of cultural and archeological significance. Other residents were concerned about environmental impacts or were satisfied with both the existing transportation system and the Borough’s available land base.

### **Requests for further studies to provide more information:**

Residents and agencies requested an inventory of land and land use, historic and cultural sites, and plants, animals, and habitats on Gravina and Revillagigedo Islands. People also requested an analysis of direct, secondary, and cumulative impacts, as well as a demonstration of public support for the project.

### **Requests for minimized impacts:**

Impacts high on the list of concerns include neighborhoods in Ketchikan, water quality, fish and wildlife resources and habitat, and marine and airspace navigation.

### **Aviation and Navigation Issues**

Tongass Narrows supports an intricate marine and aviation transportation network. The designs for any transportation link on, above, or beneath Tongass Narrows will need to maintain, or improve, the safety of this unique transportation corridor. We met with marine and air transportation providers to hear their views.



## **Frequently Asked Questions**

**Question:** Why are you studying this again?

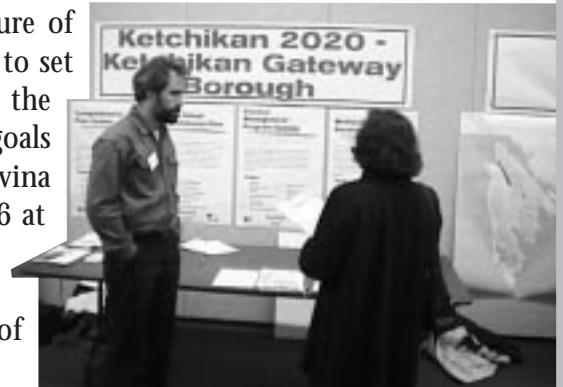
**Answer:** Requirements for the use of federal funds include compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which includes an assessment of the various alternatives. Changes in Ketchikan have prompted the need to update earlier assumptions and gather further information. In addition, the scope of the project is broader than solely access to the airport, as it also includes support of economic development on Gravina Island. Federal funding is available for the environmental and design phases of the project.

**Question:** What is the relationship between the Gravina Access Project and the Borough's Gravina Island comprehensive plan?

**Answer:** The Borough recognizes that improved access poses considerable opportunity and wants to plan for the best way to use the land on Gravina. The projects will share information, and the access alternatives developed in the Gravina Access Project will help focus the land use projections in the comprehensive plan. The coordination of the two projects enables the Borough and DOT&PF to plan for and address the opportunities that can result from improved access.

## **Ketchikan 2020 Moves Ahead**

The Borough is taking the initial steps to plan for the future of Gravina Island. A first step is to encourage the community to set preliminary goals. The Borough is sponsoring a session for the community and the Planning Commission to develop the goals and policies that establish the overall direction for the Gravina comprehensive plan. The meeting will be held December 16 at 6:00 p.m. at the Ted Ferry Civic Center. Please attend and help begin the planning process for Gravina Island. For more information please contact the Borough Department of Planning and Community Development at 228-6610.



## **Project Development Team Begins Monthly Meetings**

The project development team (PDT) consists of project team members, Native organizations, and local, state, and federal agencies with project oversight responsibility. The first meeting held in early November was well attended. The PDT meetings provide an opportunity to share information as it is developed and to address the questions and concerns of agencies and local entities.

## **What's Next?**

Over the next four months, project team members will undertake environmental studies and preliminary engineering work. The environmental team will begin characterizing and assessing the marine environment (identification of eelgrass beds and subtidal habitat, for example), threatened and endangered species, cultural and archaeological resources, and wetlands. The engineering team will outline design criteria to be used to develop alternatives, refine past studies' information on alignments and engineering requirements, and explore alternative funding strategies. Also, DOT&PF will host a public meeting/open house in Ketchikan on January 27, 2000, at the Ted Ferry Civic Center.

**Mark Your Calendar!**  
The next public meeting/open house will be held January 27th  
at the Ted Ferry Civic Center.

**The first phase of the Gravina Access Project is complete. Look inside for details.**

To:

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## **Gravina Access Project**

Over the next year, the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) will be evaluating ways to improve the connection between Revillagigedo and Gravina Islands. To do this, DOT&PF and its consultant HDR Alaska will work with area residents and businesses, the City of Ketchikan, the City of Saxman, the Ketchikan Gateway Borough, Native organizations, and agencies with jurisdiction in the area to identify improvement options, prepare engineering and environmental reports, and select a preferred alternative. The first official comment period ended October 27, 1999 (look inside for a summary of the comments), but the project team still wants to hear from you.

Please keep those comments coming by mail, fax, phone, or e-mail. You can also stop by the Ketchikan project office or log on to the project website at **[www.gravina-access.com](http://www.gravina-access.com)**. Frequently asked questions about the project are posted on the project website.

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